FROM THE BOOKSHELF #172 DECEMBER 21, 1976
RON GRUNBERG/ROGER LYONS

AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH
BY GARCIA MARQUEZ

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES .....FROM THE BOOKSHELF.....IN WHICH WE DISCUSS BOOKS AMERICANS ARE CURRENTLY READING. TODAY....A LOOK AT THE LATEST BOOK BY ONE OF THE MOST RESPECTED WRITERS IN LATIN AMERICA....COLOMBIA'S GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ. CALLED "AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH", THE BOOK, PUBLISHED BY HARPER AND ROW, IS A SURREAL LOOK AT WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED THE COMPOSITE SOUTH AMERICAN DICTATOR. NOW, HERE IS YOUR BOOK EDITOR_____.

EDITOR: GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ, AT FORTY-EIGHT, IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST WRITERS IN SOUTH AMERICA. HIS FIRST NOVEL, "ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE," WAS A FABLE ABOUT THE FANTASTIC, SOMETIMES GROTESQUE, ADVENTURES OF A POWERFUL CHARISMATIC FAMILY LIVING IN AN INACCESSIBLE JUNGLE. NOW, IN HIS SECOND NOVEL, "AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH," MARQUEZ VIEWS A MYTHICAL, UNIDENTIFIED DICTATORSHIP IN LATIN AMERICA THROUGH THE EYES OF THE DICTATOR HIMSELF, A MAN KNOWN ONLY AS "THE GENERAL".

AS THE GENERAL TELLS HIS STORY, HIS CHARACTER EMERGES AS A TIMELESS, ABSENT-MINDED, VENGEFUL MAN WHO CREATED FROM THE BLOOD OF HIS PEOPLE AN "UNAPPEALABLE MAXIMUM AUTHORITY OF SUPREME POWER." THE AUTHOR EXPLAINS THE DICTATOR'S MOTIVATION

VOICE: THE GENERAL "TRIED TO COMPENSATE ... (FOR HIS) INCAPACITY FOR LOVE WITH THE BURNING CULTIVATION OF THE SOLITARY VICE OF POWER. . . HE HAD FED ON FALLACY AND CRIME, HE HAD FLOURISHED IN IMPIETY AND DISHONOR AND HAD PUT HIMSELF ABOVE HIS FEVERISH AVARICE AND HIS CONGENITAL FEAR ... HE HAD KNOWN SINCE HIS BEGINNING THAT THEY (HIS AIDES) DECEIVED HIM IN ORDER TO PLEASE HIM, THAT THEY COLLECTED FROM HIM BY FAWNING ON HIM ... THAT A LIE IS MORE COMFORTABLE THAN DOUBT, MORE USEFUL THAN LOVE, MORE LASTING THAN TRUTH."

EDITOR: THE CRIMES AND TORTURES, THE MONSTROUS ACTS, DEFEATING LOGIC AND SANITY, AND THE INSTANCES OF EVIL TRIUMPHING OVER DECENCY, CREATE A FEELING OF DESPAIR. THIS BOOK, TWO HUNDRED SIXTY NINE PAGES LONG, HAS ONLY A SMALL NUMBER OF PARAGRAPHS AND LITTLE MORE THAN A HUNDRED SENTENCES -- THE LAST ONE BEING MORE THAN FIFTY PAGES LONG. THIS LITERARY DEVICE DEEPENS THE FEELING OF THE SEEMING ENDLESSNESS OF THE TYRANNY. FOLLOWING THE LABYRINTHINE DIALOGUE AND IMAGES AND THE OCEANS OF WORDS, THE READER IS CAUGHT UP IN THE MARVEL OF THE WRITING AND SICK HUMOR OF THE STORY. THIS SOMETIMES OBSCURES THE SHARPNESS OF THE IDEAS. BUT THAT MAY BE THE AUTHOR'S POINT -- A CONFESSION THAT TO SURVIVE AS AN INTELLECTUAL, ONE CAN'T LOOK AT THINGS TOO REALISTICALLY. HERE IS A TYPICAL EXAMPLE OF THE WRITER'S STYLE:

VOICE: "...IT WAS TWELVE O'CLOCK, BUT GENERAL RODRIGO DE AGUILAR (THE DEFENSE MINISTER) WAS NOT ARRIVING, SOMEONE STARTED TO GET UP, PLEASE, HE SAID, HE TURNED HIM TO STONE WITH

VOICE: (CONT'D) THE FATAL LOOK OF NOBODY MOVE, NOBODY BREATHE, NOBODY LIVE WITHOUT MY PERMISSION UNTIL TWELVE O'CLOCK FINISHED CHIMING, AND THEN THE CURTAINS PARTED AND THE DISTINGUISHED MAJOR GENERAL ... AGUILAR ENTERED ON A SILVER TRAY STRETCHED OUT FULL LENGTH ON A GARNISH OF CAULIFLOWER AND LAUREL LEAVES, STEEPED WITH SPICES, OVEN BROWN, EMBELLISHED WITH THE UNIFORM OF FIVE GOLDEN ALMONDS FOR SOLEMN OCCASIONS AND THE LIMITLESS LOOPS FOR VALOR ON THE SLEEVE OF HIS RIGHT ARM, FOURTEEN POUNDS OF MEDALS ON HIS CHEST AND A SPRIG OF PARSLEY IN HIS MOUTH...AND WHEN EVERY PLATE HELD AN EQUAL PORTION OF THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE STUFFED WITH PINE NUTS AND AROMATIC HERBS, HE GAVE THE ORDER TO BEGIN, EAT HEARTY, GENTLEMEN."

EDITOR: DOZENS MORE BRUTAL CRIMES ARE RECOUNTED INCLUDING -- THE KILLING OF THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN TO AVOID BEING CAUGHT IN A GAMBLING CHEAT. IN SUCH AN ATMOSPHERE THE ABSOLUTE DENIAL OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH OR OF THE PRESS AND THE ALMOST TOTAL IGNORANCE OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD WITH WHICH THE DICTATOR CONDUCTS HIS AFFAIRS SEEM INCONSEQUENTIAL. AND YET, INEVITABLY, QUESTIONS ARISE IN THE READER'S MIND: HOW DID SUCH A MAN REACH THE PINNACLE OF POWER AND MANAGE TO STAY THERE? HOW CAN SUCH DICTATORSHIPS BE SUPPORTED? WHAT CAN BE DONE TO UNSEAT THEM? WHAT WOULD BE THE COST, MORAL AND MATERIAL? GARCIA MARQUEZ DOES NOT PROVIDE ANSWERS. HE STATES THE CASE.

GREGORY RABASSA'S TRANSLATION, HIGHLY PRAISED BY THE CRITICS, DESPITE THE DIFFICULTIES OF MARQUEZ'S STYLE HAS PRESERVED MUCH OF THE BOOK'S LITERARY EXCELLENCE.

EDITOR: (CONT'D) THE AUTHOR'S SUCCESS IN MIXING BITTER SATIRE, FORCEFUL IMAGINATION AND LITERARY EXCELLENCE COMES OUT IN PASSAGES LIKE THIS ONE WHICH DEALS WITH THE SECRET POLICE:

VOICE: "HE MADE HIM ABSOLUTE MASTER OF A SECRET EMPIRE WITHIN HIS OWN PRIVATE EMPIRE, AN INVISIBLE SERVICE OF REPRESSION AND EXTERMINATION THAT NOT ONLY LACKED AN OFFICIAL IDENTITY BUT WAS EVEN DIFFICULT TO CONCEIVE OF IN ITS REAL EXISTENCE, BECAUSE NO ONE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS ACTS, NOR DID IT HAVE A NAME OR A LOCATION IN THE WORLD, AND YET IT WAS A FEARSOME TRUTH THAT HAD BEEN IMPOSED BY TERROR OVER OTHER ORGANS OF REPRESSION OF THE STATE FOR A LONG TIME BEFORE ITS ORIGINS AND ITS UNFATHOMABLE NATURE HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED IN ALL CERTAINTY BY THE HIGH COMMAND, NOT EVEN YOU YOURSELF FORESAW THE REACH OF THAT MACHINE OF HORROR, GENERAL SIR, NOR COULD I MYSELF SUSPECT THAT AT THE INSTANT IN WHICH HE ACCEPTED THE AGREEMENT I WAS AT THE MERCY OF THE IRRESTIBLE CHARM AND THE TENTACULAR DRIVE OF THAT BARBARIAN DRESSED LIKE A PRINCE WHO SENT TO ME AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE A FIBER SACK ... OF SEEMING COCONUTS ... (IN REALITY) SIX HEADS WITH CORRESPONDING DEATH CERTIFICATES.

EDITOR: NEW YORK TIMES LITERARY CRITIC CHRISTOPHER LEHMANN-HAUPT CALLS "AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH" A BOILING CAULDRON OF RAGE, LAMENT, SARCASM, DESPAIR, AFFECTION, HOPE AND EXASPERATION." IT MAY WELL BE ONE OF THOSE BOOKS WHICH, A HUNDRED YEARS HENCE, WILL BE REFERRED TO BY HISTORIANS WHEN THEY WANT TO RECAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF A TWENTIETH-CENTURY DICTATOR.

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF AMERICA'S WEEKLY PROGRAM FROM THE BOOKSHELF IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS OF CURRENT INTEREST TO AMERICANS. TODAY'S DISCUSSION DEALT WITH AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH BY GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ. LISTEN NEXT WEEK (AT THIS TIME) FOR ANOTHER REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE CHOOSING...FROM THE BOOKSHELF.

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